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Regarding Henry

I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl (Job 31:1; NIV).

PEOPLE WHO WRITE BOOKS are normally authorities on their subject. If you read a book about planting flowers, you would expect that the author had plenty of experience and a beautiful yard. If you read a book about politics, you would expect the author to be a seasoned veteran of political campaigns, an author whose insights could lead to victory on the campaign trail.

I hesitate to call myself an authority on pornography and adult entertainment. My exposure would hardly qualify me as an expert. I do know about sexual temptation, however. I also know about defeat. I have felt its sting many times as a teenager and as an adult. Thankfully, I also know about the victory that is found in Jesus Christ.

I grew up with pornography at my fingertips. During my formative junior and senior high years, there were very few issues of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* that escaped my view. Magazines that had been discarded near my home were

quickly captured and hidden for another day. In my life, the seeds were planted. They were seeds that took root.

I went to an all-male military college and the bookstore was kind enough to provide my favorite magazines without the fear of being caught by my parents. Now I could buy my own magazines. I could also share with other guys in the barracks. As my fascination with pornography grew, my shame decreased. Upon graduation I was assigned to the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. The Army post was adjacent to the city of Columbus, which had numerous sexually oriented businesses. Ladies looked just like the ones I had seen in the magazines, except they performed live and in person. I invested countless one-dollar bills in the g-strings of attractive dancers. My weekend calendar became very full.

I remember going to a club by myself once when one of the dancers asked if she could join me. I was a young 21-year-old army officer and a beautiful dancer wanted to sit with me! Wow! As soon as she sat down the waitress suddenly appeared and asked if I wanted something to drink. When I ordered a Coke the waitress asked, "Would you like to order something for the lady?" "Sure," I replied. "What would you like?" She ordered a carafe of wine, which cost me ten bucks. I convinced myself it was worth it because she was so beautiful. I also thought she liked me. In a short time we seemed to hit it off very well.

You would not believe how fast my new friend drank that wine. At these clubs I learned the art of taking an hour to drink a Coke, but my gorgeous dancer knew how to drink a carafe of wine in five minutes. As soon as she took the last sip the waitress appeared again. "Would you like to order the lady something else?" I'm no cheapskate; of course she could have something else. She ordered another carafe of wine. Ten more bucks down the drain. That night I spent 40 dollars for wine that I later found out was colored water. She didn't like me, she liked my wallet. As soon as the money was gone, so

was my “new friend.” After dumping me, she found another male victim who gladly bought her more “wine.”

You might think that after getting ripped off for my stupidity, I would never grace the doors of a sexually oriented business again. No such luck. I had recovered from the embarrassment by the next weekend. The only change was that I was determined to drink my Coke alone.

Watching women dance and strip was exciting, but soon the thrill was gone. I needed something more. I was in another club when a dancer came up behind me and whispered, “Are you ready to party?” “Sure,” I replied, as she sat down wearing something that looked like a skimpy cheerleader’s outfit. I ordered my usual Coke and she ordered a beer. After a few minutes she asked me if I wanted her to dance for me. I never had a lap dance before so I asked her for the details.

“It’s 10 dollars if I dance here at the table,” she said. “I won’t touch you and you can’t touch me.” She pointed to a room off to the side that didn’t have any doors and said, “If we go in there it is 20 dollars. It’s a little more quiet and I’ll touch you, but you still can’t touch me.” I liked the direction this was going as she told me about the third option. “Or we can go upstairs,” she said, smiling. “It’s very private and we can touch each other.” The cost for this option was 30 dollars. My mind was racing as she waited expectantly for an answer. I knew I was negotiating with a stripper but she seemed more like Monty Hall from the television show “Let’s Make a Deal.” Which door would I choose?

Once again she whispered, “Are you ready to party?” I knew I shouldn’t be in the club but a beautiful dancer was whispering in my ear waiting for my answer. That was not the time to make a righteous decision. I had lost the battle to lust before I ever walked into the building. Without looking the dancer in the eyes, I told her I wanted to go upstairs. Once we were on a couch in a secluded room, one dance turned into two and two dances turned into three. After five dances,

lasting less than 20 minutes, I handed her \$150, almost a third of my monthly take home pay. I was overcome with shame and excitement at the same time.

I thank God because my experience could have been much worse. Several times I was propositioned outside clubs, but for some reason I always declined. This was before herpes and AIDS became well known so I had no real fear of disease. Looking back, I believe God protected me in these experiences.

Maybe your story is worse, but I know what it feels like. After coming to Christ I still was not free from lust but I knew there was hope. There were good days and bad days. Someone once said, "When you flee temptation, don't leave a forwarding address." Unfortunately, I often did more than leave a forwarding address. I packed temptation in my suitcase.

In Romans 7:15, Paul wrote, "For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate." That verse described me too well. At times I felt trapped. The temptation was overpowering and the only way to make it stop was to give in. Overcome with guilt, temptations left for a short period but always came back with greater force.

What I have discovered is that I am weakest when God is not my top priority. When I am teaching a Sunday school class or listening to a sermon, sexual temptation never even crosses my mind. When I am fervently praying or reading God's word, temptation has no access to my mind. The door slams shut when God fills my thoughts. When I am not reading the Bible or praying regularly, my thoughts will wander much more during the course of the day.

In James 4:8 it is written, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." Doesn't that make sense? If we draw near to God, He draws near to us! As God draws near, temptation is weakened. Of course, I still face

temptation today, but in itself temptation is not a sin. The difference is that now I know I can be victorious. I have the power to choose. I no longer “have” to give in. I have also learned that there is great joy in victory over temptation.

I believe my own experience is proof that God’s word is true. In 1 Corinthians 10:12–13, Paul wrote, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” Those are just two verses but they are packed full of helpful information for the man struggling with sexual temptation. Let’s see what Paul tells us.

1. *Don’t think for a minute that you cannot fall.* Men who tell me that they do not experience sexual temptation scare me most of all. I know I am just one bad decision from taking a fall. I also know the only thing that can protect me is my obedience to God. My purity is not a matter of pride; it’s a matter of prayer and protection.
2. *Temptation’s desire is to overtake you.* Temptations are not something out there for you to try to find. Temptation will not only find you, but it can overtake you. I remember playing a football game as a child and I caught a pass and was running as fast as I could for the end zone. Unfortunately, the defender was faster. He overtook me before I scored and grabbed my collar and threw me down hard to the ground. I went down before I got to the end zone. Sexual temptation has overtaken me, too. Like my failed touchdown run, temptation grabbed me and threw me hard to the ground.
3. *Your temptation is common to man.* Every living, breathing man and woman is tempted. You are not